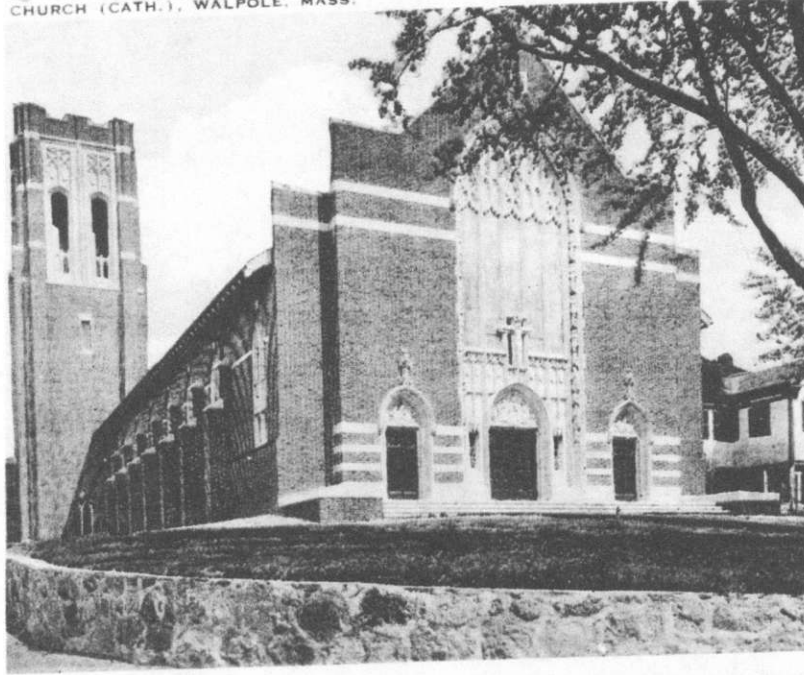


BLESSED SACREMENT CHURCH
OF WALPOLE

SAINT MARY'S CHURCH
OF EAST WALPOLE

Sacrament Church, St Francis 1023 1227
CHURCH (CATH.), WALPOLE, MASS.



uilt about 1879. Doors hand car
+ 1910 + 1910 + 1910

THE HISTORY OF
THE
BLESSED SACREMENT CHURCH
OF
WALPOLE,MASS.

Blessed Sacrament Church, Walpole, Ma





I. The Forest Primeval

THE STORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH in Walpole follows closely the pattern of growth of the archdiocese of Boston, just as the town of Walpole followed the general pattern of growth of the towns within the Bay Colony, now become the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Geography and the kind of life people lived because of it determined the growth of Massachusetts Bay passed:

When the first settlers came to Massachusetts in the 1620's, 30's and 40's they had nothing but what they could bring in their limited baggage and very little with which to buy in their still more limited purses. Massachusetts had two things Europe needed: forests and fish. The fish were in the waters of the Bay; the forests were at her back door.

As a result hamlets sprang up along the shore wherever harbors could shelter fishing boats. Other settlements followed the retreating forests inland. Walpole was one of these, inland about twenty miles from the coast. From earliest days we read of crude mills here along the twists and tributaries of the Neponset, saw mills for lumber, grist mills for food. The few families who worked them were located near by.

Yet the settlement of Walpole was not accidental. The towns of Boston, Providence, New York and Springfield had not been settled very long before they were connected by trails which grew with use into coach roads and post roads. Towns grew along these main arteries which carried the commerce of that primitive day to ports and trading centers.

Walpole developed along the roads to Providence, an extension towards the south of the town of Dedham, which in its turn had been an extension of the town of Boston. For many years Walpole was a part of South Dedham. The first home-steaders came to Walpole about 1663 but it was not until 1724 that the Great and General Court of the Province of Massachusetts Bay passed:

"An Act for the Dividing of the Town of Dedham and making a new Town there by the Name of Walpole

"Whereas the South Part of the Town of Dedham within the County of Norfolk is compresetly settled with inhabitants who labor under great difficulties by their remoteness from a Place of Public Worship . . .

"Provided that the inhabitants of said Town of Walpole do within the space of eighteen months from the publication of this Act, Erect and Furnish a suitable house for the Public Worship of God, and . . . Procure and settle a learned Orthodox Minister of good conversation and make provision for his comfortable and honorable support.

"That the inhabitants of the Town of Walpole . . . are empowered to assess all lands . . . one penny per acre towards the charge of building the Meeting House and settling and maintaining a minister there."

In this incorporation Walpole typified the elder towns of Massachusetts Bay. In the original colony the town grew around a congregation, whence the name Congregationalist. The civil unit was established to provide taxation to pay the minister's salary, and in course of time, the teacher's. Walpole was, therefore, a definite congregation, a group of hard-working, God-fearing men and women—purely Protestant in their belief and their philosophy, doing the best they could to build for themselves and their children a good life in an unbroken land.

If into the life of Walpole through the first hundred years transient workers moved, following the demands for laborers in mills, woods or farms — transient workers of a different race and faith — they made no impression upon the tight little town. No mention of them appears in its town records. They were neither numerous enough nor permanent enough to attract attention. They paid no taxes for they owned no land.

The first Catholics came to Walpole sometime in the winter of 1755-56. In our modern phrase they were displaced persons. In that year the English Navy expelled the neutral French Acadians from what is now Nova Scotia, breaking up families and scattering their members among the settlements of the eastern seaboard — a story Longfellow has told in *Evangeline*.

A large number were dropped in Boston. The Great and General Court, not knowing what to do with them, in turn divided them among the towns of the colony. Eight adults and three children were sent to Walpole. Ill, destitute, unable to speak the language, they were a problem to the town. They had to be housed in a community with no spare houses, fed and nursed, for some were desperately ill.

For some years they remained in the town, very often in need of public charity, always hoping and petitioning to be returned to their own land. After a wait of ten years, the Acadians of the Bay Colony banded together to walk back

through the forests of Maine to their own land. With this group went the Walpole Acadians, and so disappear from town history.

They left behind at least one dead man, buried in the old cemetery at the corner of Main and Kendall Streets — buried without the benefit of the lovely and consoling ritual of Holy Church he had known in his Acadian days. They left, too, a memory of the burden they had been to the town. The first Catholics never became a part of the town. They merely drifted across its life as dead leaves might drift across a pool without rippling the water.

Years passed. The Revolution came and went. In the roster of Walpole soldiers of the American army are names of decidedly Irish derivation. In 1754 Nicholas Buckley was a provincial volunteer. In the Continental army were Edward Murfee and Timothy Callahan. Who these were, whether residents or transient workers, Irish Protestants or Irish Catholics, the blank pages of history do not tell.

Just at the close of this period a notable event fastened the attention of the town for one brief moment upon a great Catholic figure. When Bishop Cheverus left Boston for Europe a large delegation of the men of Boston walked beside his carriage as far as Walpole. There they parted. The Bishop went on to France to become Archbishop of Bordeaux, and later a Cardinal; the men, the sturdy pioneers of this great archdiocese, walked back to Boston and into history.

II. The Scattering of the Seed

BY 1824, the beginning of the second hundred years of Walpole, a new influence had been brought to bear upon the town. Water driven mills were adapted to make textiles and all their related products. By every swift fall in rivers small factories sprang up. But there were many of these in Walpole where in a series of ten water privileges or mill sites the Neponset has a combined fall of 155 feet. There were many, also, in the neighboring towns of Easton, Mansfield, Foxboro and Franklin. These small mills, like greater ones in Fall River and Taunton, needed workers, "hands". When there were not enough local people available, these hands were recruited from the tide of immigration beginning to flow westward from Europe.

It is difficult to reconstruct this scene. It is like trying to rub off a black film which time and age have laid upon a painting, to distinguish the figures beneath. It is very difficult because it was so simple, so very common-place. Most of these workers were transients, unmarried men, here today and gone tomorrow. They

made as little impression upon the life of the town as did the Acadians half a century earlier.

Yet since it is characteristic of human nature to make homes where there is work, it is not improbable that some Catholic families, Irish or perhaps French, settled in the town. Gradually, for lack of spiritual attention, their children drifted away from the Church they had never really known and were absorbed into Protestant congregations.

Even as late as 1833 the Congregational Church was supported by public taxation. In that year the legislature of Massachusetts severed the connection between the church and the state of Massachusetts, an act which Professor Albert Bushnell Hart points out as the final step in establishing a condition of religious freedom in the state.

That there were Catholics in Walpole in these early industrial days is attested from several sources. Here and there in the old burying ground at the corner of Main and Kendall streets are a few stones upon which are inscribed the letters R.I.P. There, too, are found a cross or two, a cluster of grapes, a sheaf of wheat, symbols since time immemorial of the Blessed Sacrament. Do these mark the burial place of some wandering child of the Church come to rest in an alien land — of one who left no mark upon the place, but who through long cycles of time, gives testimony to a living faith?

Then, too, in the records of Saint Augustine's parish in South Boston, established in 1819 by Father Matignon, are records of marriages and baptisms of residents of Walpole.

The first mention of Catholics in Walpole comes, not from town history, but from an account of Reverend Peter Connolly, a young priest who, from his parish in Sandwich on Cape Cod, maintained a sort of roving apostolate among the transient Irish mill hands of southeastern Massachusetts. It is recorded that several times in the years between 1830 and 1832 he visited Easton, Foxboro and Walpole on horseback, caring for the spiritual needs of such Catholics as he found there, saying Mass, administering the sacraments.

Does it seem strange that Walpole should have been tended from Sandwich seventy miles away, rather than from Boston, scarcely twenty? It was, on the contrary, quite natural. At this time the whole diocese of Boston, which

embraced as well Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island and part of Connecticut, there were but fourteen priests besides the Bishop. These were of necessity widely scattered. The few who were in Boston to care for that heavily populated section were too busy to go out into the country.

Sandwich on Cape Cod was a center for glass. The workers, recruited directly from East Cambridge, were originally glass workers from County Waterford. Sandwich had become in the twenties a small but flourishing congregation and a new church was built there. From this center Father Peter Connolly, not long ordained and full of apostolic zeal, roamed the mill centers in search of Irish workmen, doing truly missionary work, for at that time the United States was a missionary country. Many Irish from Waterford arrived first at Sandwich and thence made their way to large centers, Fall River and Taunton, and to smaller ones, Foxboro, Wrentham and Walpole. Indeed many Walpole families of today trace their ancestry back to County Waterford.

No mention is made in the unwritten history of the parish, handed down from one generation to another, of any serious opposition to the ministrations of Father Connolly or of any of the priests who followed him through the succeeding years. Yet in 1832 the Congregational Church was still the official church of Massachusetts and the salaries of its ministers were paid out of public tax funds. Perhaps the Mass and the sacraments were performed so quietly no one was aware of what was going on. No one seems to have cared unduly, or to have been unduly alarmed.

Yet in Massachusetts throughout the forties and continuing almost to the Civil War there was directed against Catholics a rising tide of political and religious opposition, known commonly as the "Know Nothing Movement." There were several reasons for this.

First there was the threat of sheer numbers. The ever swelling influx of Irish was arousing a certain fear as to whether in the end they might not overwhelm the already established citizenry. This is a natural reaction and timeless. It is heard today whenever a shipload of displaced persons arrives upon our shores. It is the outcome of the human craving for security, and the fear of anything that may endanger it.

There was also another, an inherited complication. The native Protestant population of Massachusetts had an English background. They were descendants of that race which had fought for years to compel the Irish to accept a status as a dependent and quiescent province within the British Empire. For hundreds of years

the Irish had resisted this status, and had risen in each generation to fight long and bloodily against the forces which were to them still after so many centuries "the invader." It was inevitable that conflict should arise between their descendants in the new world, for they had neither of them as yet come to know the full meaning of the word "American". The time for that was still far off.

Walpole was quite typical of its age and generation. There was opposition to the newcomers; that was to be expected. It was bitter rather than violent, due perhaps to the fact that the southeastern section of the diocese grew very slowly. The industries of Walpole were small and diverse. The number of hands they needed to employ was limited. The building of the railroad brought numbers of young Irishmen in its wake, but these tended to center in Dedham and in Norwood, rather than in Walpole. The Irish who came to Walpole were not many, and therefore were not so grave a problem. Like the Acadians who preceded them, for many years they drifted across the life of the town.

III. The Seed Takes Root

IN THE YEARS OF THE 30's, 40's and 50's, through the episcopacies of Bishop Benedict Fenwick and his successor, John Fitzpatrick, the story of Walpole and its neighbors was the story of small missions attached, or rather detached, from one city parish after another as the number of priests and churches grew. Even during the years of Father Peter Connolly Walpole was a station of Saint Augustine's in South Boston. There is no record that any priest from this parish ever said Mass in Walpole, although there are records to prove that people from Walpole went there for baptisms and marriages.

When Saint Patrick's Church was built in the south end of Boston in 1836 Walpole became a mission of that parish and remained so until 1846 when it was attached to Saint Joseph's in Roxbury, better and more affectionately known as Tommy's Rock. There for the next decade the Catholics of Walpole were baptized and married; there are the records of pre-Civil War days. At this time Mass was celebrated with some degree of regularity in the Old Temperance Hall in Dedham, and later in a Universalist Church in South Dedham, now Norwood. To these some of the Catholics walked for Sunday Mass. Others, in the 1860's, went to Canton.

That Irish were in Walpole in considerable numbers during Civil War days is borne out by town records. Here are but a few names so distinctively Celtic as to leave no question. Patrick Hern was killed in 1862 in the Battle of Bull Run. Patrick Driscoll appears upon the roll of honor of Regiment 12. There are other names upon

the roster of Regiments: John McGinnis, Patrick Flood, John Daily, Michael Griffin, Patrick Kirby and Thomas Shea, to mention but a few.

In 1866, the year after the Civil War, His Excellency John J. Williams began his long episcopate which stretched across one century well into the first decade of the next. Just previous to his accession, in 1863, to lessen the burdens upon the priest of Saint Joseph's in Roxbury, the missions of Foxboro, Wrentham, Walpole and Mansfield were attached to North Attleboro. At this time the parish was attended by a very active priest from Greenville, Rhode Island, a Father Philip Gillick. In 1866 Father Gillick resigned from his parish at Greenville to devote all his time to North Attleboro and its flock of little stations.

With Father Philip Gillick the Catholic parish of Walpole, as we know it, really begins. He was not the first pastor of Walpole but he is lovingly remembered as the first priest to care for the religious needs of Walpole with any degree of permanency and continuity. Nor could Walpole have had any better introduction to the ministry of the Church than at the hands of this good and holy man.

Because of his learning and his integrity he was one of the best-known citizens of North Attleboro in his day, but the little congregation at Walpole knew him rather for his priestly devotion and his Christ-like kindness. Rain or shine, summer or winter, he traveled in his familiar horse and buggy over rough roads to tend his missions. He said one Mass each Sunday in his church at North Attleboro. The second he said in rotation at one of his stations, so that the people of Walpole had Mass once a month in their own town. On other Sundays they had a choice of walking to Dedham, Roxbury, Canton, or one or other of the missions.

Father Gillick said Mass in Walpole at private houses. We do not know whether he tried to secure a public building as he did in Franklin, or a mill-room as did Father Gouesse in a later day. We do know that he said Mass in the home of Roger Cunningham who lived first in a section called Honey Pot, in a house which stood near what is today the junction of Winter Street and Route 1-A opposite the entrance to the State Prison Colony, and later in a house to which he moved on Stone Street. We next hear of Mass being said in a more central location in the home of Michael Buckley, a small red house which stood where today there is the cleansing and dyeing shop near the A & P store.

A few of the older members of our parish were baptized by Father Gillick, and their birth records are in North Attleboro, together with the records of his Walpole marriages, confirmations and funerals. Although very few of the oldest parishion-

ers can recall him, Father Gillick still lives in their memory because he was dearly beloved by a vanished generation who made him the subject of many stories. They told of his selfless devotion to duty, or his visits when bereavement struck and a family stood in need of comfort and consolation. No storm was too violent to keep him from saying his second Mass, no road too impassable to keep him from administering the last rites or bringing Viaticum to brighten the dark journey of a dying man.

Nor did they tire of telling of his help and strengthening presence at the time a dreadful epidemic struck, a mysterious fatal sickness brought from Russia in some badly cured hides, a plague which felled worker after worker in the hair mill of Manning, Glover and Cram on South Street. Day after day Father Gillick toiled, side by side with Doctor Stone, the fine Doctor for whom the street is named, the one striving to drive the poison from the bodies of men, the other caring for their souls.

The depth of his parishioners' devotion to Father Gillick is shown by this story, told here not because it is true — and it may be — nor because it is not true — and it may not be — but to show that the Catholics of Walpole paid him the supreme tribute Catholics can pay to a priest's work. They credited him with a miracle. It was performed during the epidemic, a simple thing and that weighs heavily towards its authenticity. When men invent stories of miracles they are usually fantastic; when God performs one it is apt to be a very simple, natural thing. One of the afflicted workers was at the point of death. Father Gillick anointed him and said the prayers of the dying over him. Immediately the sick man was cured, and in the course of a few hours was about his daily occupations.

Father Gillick remained in charge of Walpole until 1872. He might have continued to care for it indefinitely had not a major change, over which neither priest nor people had control, taken place. In 1872 the new diocese of Providence was established. Its dividing line was drawn at North Attleboro. Father Gillick became a member of the diocese of Providence. Walpole and its neighbors remained within the Boston archdiocese. A new parish was created with Walpole as its center, and the other three as missions attached to it. To this as pastor came Father Francis Gouesse.

IV. The First Fruits

FATHER GOUESSE was typical of the many priests who served in the first years of the Boston diocese, when the demand for priests was far in excess of the supply, when the few native clergy had to be supplemented by priests from Catholic dioceses of Europe who volunteered for the missions. It was the lend-lease

plan of today in reverse. Some of priests of these early years came from Ireland, some from Italy, most of them came from France.

One of these was Father Francis Gouesse, born in Laval in 1817. He studied theology in Saint Sulpice but before ordination came to America in search of a bishop. Although we have no documentary proof of it, tradition has it that he was ordained in 1845 by Bishop Blanc in New Orleans.

His first assignment was as superintendent of Saint Mary's Orphan Boys Asylum in New Orleans. After several years' service here, he volunteered for the frontier missions of Michigan and Indiana. Later he worked in New York until ill health forced him to return to France for a brief period of rest. In 1869, at the age of 52, he came to Massachusetts to relieve the pastors of several parishes, especially those of Southbridge and Randolph. In Marlboro he organized a flourishing French Canadian parish and built a church. Almost immediately upon the completion of this came his assignment to Walpole, as its first pastor.

But Walpole had neither church nor rectory. Father Gouesse, therefore, made his headquarters in Foxboro where Father Gillick had built a church and, upon its destruction by fire, had rebuilt it. Before its completion the diocese of Providence had been cut off. It fell to Father Gouesse to complete the church. He remained in Foxboro until this had been done and the debt was in a fair way to be paid off. In the meantime he followed Father Gillick's example and continued to say Mass for his Walpole congregation in private houses, and, like Father Gillick, the new pastor to forestall the appearance of favoritism, said Mass in several places. Among these were the homes of William Mahoney on South Street, close to the hair mill, and of Timothy Hale, where a section of the Kendall Mill now stands. Confessions were heard usually in the home of William Mahoney.

After the church at Foxboro was well under way towards independence, Father Gouesse removed to Walpole. He bought for a rectory a house on Kendall Street at Number 191, now the home of Mr. Henry Caldwell. It was not long before Father Gouesse made the acquaintance of Mr. Jerome Bonaparte Cram, part owner of Manning, Glover and Company, manufacturers of curled hair, mattresses, cotton batting and wicking, whose mill stood on South Street. When the acquaintance had ripened into friendship, Mr. Cram offered the use of the mill for services and for Mass until such time as Father Gouesse could build a church. Not only did Mr. Cram give Father Gouesse the use of his mill, but he is said to have aided in selecting and acquiring the present site of the Blessed Sacrament Church.

In a history of the diocese which appeared about the turn of the century, there appeared a fantastic story of the secrecy and finesse Father Gouesse had to

use not only to hold services but to obtain property upon which to build a church. It stated that when negotiations were in progress the priest left town with great ostentation and remained away for three months. During that time the property was bought for him by a straw man. The cold facts of the Registrar's Office in Dedham (Book 440, page 4) do not bear out this tale. There does not seem to have been any attempt at secrecy. The property owner had been in possession for some years and transferred it directly to the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston on May 8, 1873.

That such a story could have been told and published is evidence of the fact that some opposition did exist. It is even possible that pressure may have been brought to bear upon the owner not to sell. Such things are not unknown even in our own day, in various places and for various reasons. But no credence can be placed upon the story embroidered over the fact.

Nor can there have been too great delay in obtaining the property, for the diocese of Providence was set off February 16, 1872 and the purchase of the land at the corner of Diamond and East Streets was made in May of 1873, little more than a year later. We have no written documents upon the transaction other than the deed to the property; no accurate verbal records except a series of recollections of what our older parishioners heard, or seem to remember that they had heard about it. Since all this took place seventy-six years ago, and since children of six or even young people of twenty are not particularly interested in real estate details, the story is probably somewhat as follows.

Father Gillick, who was an intelligent man, knew it was but a matter of time before he would have to build a church in Walpole, but being a wise man also he built but one church at a time. His experience during the epidemic at the hair mill had given him a better acquaintance with the town and certainly with J. B. Cram, the active manager of the mill. Very probably the matter of the property had been the subject of more than one discussion between the men. When the dioceses were separated in 1872 and Father Gouesse succeeded Father Gillick, it is not improbable that Father Gillick turned over to Father Gouesse the information and perhaps the preliminary negotiations for the property, together with the good-will and friendly interest of the mill-man, old J. B., as he was called affectionately.

It was not long before the acquaintance of mill-owner and Catholic priest grew into friendship and the established business man smoothed the way of the new pastor.

For many months Father Gouesse worked to assemble funds to start the building of the church and to place his missions of Franklin and Foxboro on a sound financial footing. Alas for the best-laid plans of mice and men. Calamity struck in the approved Hollywood fashion. In 1876, when Father Gouesse was deep in building the Walpole church, the Foxboro church was destroyed by fire one week after its fire insurance had lapsed. Father Gouesse replaced this church with a small barn-like structure and procured the transfer of the mission to Franklin, which he had cleared from debt and had caused to be established as an independent parish in 1877.

To return to Walpole. In November of 1874, Father Gouesse, having reduced his missions to order, turned the first sod upon the lot on Diamond and East Streets for the future Saint Francis Church. This is the account of it as it is recalled by William Mahoney, then a little boy in primary school, now one of our oldest parishioners. One weekday morning in November — he is sure it was a weekday because it had been declared a school holiday for the Catholic children — Father Gouesse, surrounded by as many of his little congregation as could take time off for the ceremony, met on the property where the location of the church had already been staked out. There he dug the first sod, followed in turn by each of the men present. Some of those whom the little boy of 1874 recalls were his father, William Mahoney, Michael Dalton, Roger Cunningham, in whose house many Masses had been said, Timothy Hale, another parishioner who had given his house for Mass, John Rooney, Patrick Smith, James Smith, Edward Cashin, Patrick Riordan, Patrick Kivlin, Peter Moore, Patrick Dalton, David O'Brien and his son James P. O'Brien, Michael Mansfield, Thomas Kannelly, John Bulger, Patrick Crowley, and a Mr. Gallagher of South Street. There may have been many others, and many women, too, but the memory of the primary school boy with an unexpected holiday before him failed to register them. Nor were there photographers or news reporters present to record the simple little ceremony in the rather remote spot.

The work of digging the cellar of Saint Francis church, for Father Gouesse had named his new church in honor of his patron, Saint Francis of Assisi, proceeded slowly. There were no mechanized helps, no steam shovels, no bull-dozers. Moreover there was no money except for essential needs. Many of the men contributed hours of labor instead of money; many worked with pick and shovel to save what money there was for work that called for skill. Up to the time the ground became too frozen to work, and all through the following spring and summer, and throughout the year following that the parishioners worked. They labored to lay the foundation, they worked to gather funds, but the church grew very slowly.

In October of 1876 a fair lasting for a week was held in Bacon Hall. A considerable sum of money was raised through the generosity and good-will of the non-Catholics of the town as well as through the hard work of the parish. Finally in December of 1876 the basement was ready for occupancy and services. The first Mass was celebrated by Father Gouesse on Christmas Day.

The basement of the original Saint Francis Church was not elaborate. The plan called for a simple wooden frame building, large enough to seat about four-hundred people, a bare utilitarian structure built with the scant funds of poor people. The furnishings were most modest. The pews were simple benches; the altar a wooden one made by a carpenter. In the front corner on the epistle side stood a wood-burning furnace which gave what heat it could to Sunday morning congregations. John Mahoney, the first janitor, did his best to keep it stoked. In this he was ably assisted by the first altar boys, Harry and Frank Lane, Thomas Mahoney and Terrence Hennessey. About two years later, when the upper church was finished, a one-pipe hot-air furnace was installed and two other altar boys, William Mahoney and Daniel Dalton, were added. Somewhat later other altar boys, among them Hugh McElheney, Patrick Lane, Patrick Mahoney and William Hale were added, to serve, as did their predecessors, at the altar and at the furnace.

While work on the basement was under way Father Gouesse, who had been living on Kendall Street, began the construction of a rectory. By the time the basement was finished he was able to move into 10 Diamond Street. The rectory of today does not resemble very much the house Father Gouesse built. Nevertheless the original building is there. The two front offices are almost as they were. One of them was used as a morning chapel for weekday Mass during the winter months. In it many of the present parishioners were married or baptized.

Work on the upper structure of the church continued; early in the winter of 1879 it was finished. The first Mass was said by Father Gouesse on Christmas of that year. The church was very simple, the altar a crude wooden one, the whole auditorium painfully bare. The work of beautifying it went on for several years. By 1884 it was fairly complete. A new altar, the gift of Monsignor Dion O'Callaghan of South Boston, long a close friend of Father Gouesse, had been installed. Stained glass windows — for the most part gifts of parish families — were set in place; the stations of the cross, also gifts of the parish, were upon the walls. Two windows, however, were the gift of non-Catholics. One was given by George Plympton in memory of Patrick Smith, the first Irishman he had employed, the other by Francis W. Bird, in memory of Patrick Connolley who had been killed in an accident in the Bird mill.

When, in later years, a new church was being constructed in South Norwood for the Polish people of the district Father Riley gave the altar, the stations

of the cross, and the pews as a donation. They are there today, sacred relics of the old St. Francis Church.

The church was dedicated by Father Gouesse himself; he had received from Archbishop Williams the faculties necessary to bless the altar and erect the stations.

Father Gouesse was now sixty-five years old. He had given up the missions of Foxboro and Franklin. Nevertheless his gradually failing health was being taxed by his pastoral duties, for Walpole had grown from the dozen families of 1850 to almost 350 families. So scarce were priests in the diocese, however, that it was not until twenty years later, when Father Gouesse was eighty-four years old, that an assistant was sent to help him.

The first curate sent to Walpole was a Father Fennessey, and very little is known about him. Since he, too, was in failing health, his stay was very short. In the brief month of his service he organized two choirs, one of adults, the other of children. Although his stay was short there are many still who can recall him.

Father Fennessey was succeeded by Father James Courtney, a young man not long ordained. He remained in the parish until after the death of Father Gouesse.

The first pastor was now a very old man, worn out by his single handed work of many years, in Walpole and his earlier missions. He could no longer do any of the more arduous duties. There are many in the parish who recollect him in these last years, an old man in an arm chair, sitting, whenever the weather was warm and sunny, under the maple tree which stood between the rectory and the church. There he would read his office or doze off to dream the dreams of an old man with his work behind him. There he entertained the children with stories of his beloved France.

So dear did this spot under the maple become to him that he left a written request that when he died he might be buried under it with a monument to mark his grave. Father Gouesse died on January 14, 1901. He was buried under his tree; his monument had to await a later day.

But time and change and the exigencies of a growing parish cannot always respect the wishes of dead men, not even of an old, well-loved priest. When the time came to rebuild the church the grave of Father Gouesse had to be moved, even as his beloved maple had to be sacrificed to the new structure. The body of Father Gouesse was transferred to a new grave under the church. The spot is marked by

four granite posts, set off by chains, directly below the altar. Nor was his love for his maple tree forgotten, for a section of the trunk, about four feet of it above the root, was laid above him. And there, under the altar of the beautiful church which replaces the little wooden one he built, under the faithful guard of his maple tree, in the abiding presence of the Blessed Sacrament, Father Gouesse, first pastor of Walpole, sleeps. Nor was his request for a monument forgotten. Look closely sometime at the brass plate upon the lovely altar of the Sacred Heart. It reads: In memory of Reverend Francis Gouesse. Look closely, too, at the chalice used at Mass on Sundays and on Holy Days. It is the chalice Father Gouesse brought with him from France, the only keep-sake the parish has of the devoted and saintly man who was its founder — the only keep-sake, but a precious one.

V. The Ripening Harvest

ONE WEEK after the death of Father Gouesse the Reverend Daniel Riley came to Walpole as its second pastor. Up to this time he had been assistant at Bridgewater. Ordained in December, 1882, Father Riley was now nineteen years a priest and in the full flower of manhood. Physically vigorous, spiritually strong, a student of people rather than of books, Father Riley entered upon the duties of his office with characteristic zeal and fire. He had many excellent qualities but his kindness and sympathy were pre-eminent. His whole administration of the parish is epitomized in the manner in which he handled the matter of Father Gouesse's grave. His sympathy made him feel the poignancy of the old man's request; his sound common sense told him that sentiment should not be allowed to stand in the way of progress; his keen intelligence led him to find a way in which his predecessor's wishes could be satisfied in a greater degree than Father Gouesse ever dreamed, and yet the new and beautiful church which Father Riley already visualized was not forced into an awkward angle because of the location of a grave.

When Father Riley took over Walpole in the first years of the century Walpole had expanded, although by some standards it was still a small parish. In a history of the diocese published in 1899 the families are distributed as follows:

"Irish, 324; French, 28; Italian, 9; Portuguese, 1. There are 150 English speaking Canadians."

Because Father Riley was a young man and able to do a good deal of work, almost immediately the Archbishop attached Medfield to Walpole as a mission. This little town had been alternately part of Roxbury, Dedham, Foxboro and South Natick. It had been long isolated and there was much work to be done. Father

Riley, therefore, left the routine of the main parish in the able hands of his assistant, Father Courtney, and took over the work in Medfield. This he performed faithfully until that mission was cut off and made into a separate parish in 1903.

Father Riley was the better able to do this because the material affairs of the parish were under the supervision of Mr. Michael Downing, whose vigilant care of the parish property had lightened the burdens of the old man's declining years. When Father Riley became pastor Mr. Downing remained in charge for many more long and faithful years. He contributed no little to the parish welfare.

Father Riley had not long been pastor of Walpole when it became evident that the growing industries of the town were attracting many people, some of whom were Catholics. Saint Francis Church was fast becoming inadequate to meet their needs. The first answer and the easiest was to increase the number of Sunday Masses. This was but a temporary solution for no sooner had a Mass been added when that, also, became over-crowded. The answer was a larger church, so Father Riley began to set aside funds to enable him to start rebuilding.

It was not until 1911 that he could see his way clear towards making plans for the actual building. Then came the troublesome problem of where to locate it. The center of the town of Walpole was where it had been for many years, around the Common and the streets which led from it. Many of the parishioners felt that the time had come to remove the church from the site Father Gouesse had selected to a more central spot. One of the members of the parish who had built a very successful contracting business, Mr. Michael McCarthy, offered to Father Riley as a gift to the parish his estate on Common Street. This was an ideal spot and Father Riley was urged to accept it.

However, East Walpole, another section of the town where a number of Catholic families had settled, was much dissatisfied with the prospect of a new location, for in those days before the automobile had become the common unit of transportation distance was more important than it is today.

After a great deal of thought — and — because Father Riley was a pious man — a good deal of prayer, it was decided to retain the original site. A few years later, when East Walpole was cut off from the mother parish, there was regret at the decision. Nevertheless the answer lies in the mysterious providence of God. The church could have no more beautiful setting than it has. Although at the present moment it stands somewhat apart from the more populous parts of the town, it was not built solely for the needs of today but for tomorrow as well and tomorrow is still in God's Hands.

In 1911, therefore, Father Riley was ready to select an architect and talk plans. He chose one by the name of Matthew Sullivan and gave him an idea of the kind of church he had in mind — brick, with a bell tower, a large auditorium for Sunday Masses, and a morning chapel. Matthew Sullivan died fairly young, before he had done too much important work, but the Blessed Sacrament Church of Walpole is testimony to the worth of his talent. Even in the architect's drawing Father Riley could detect the beauty of line and proportion, the grace of the tower which distinguishes the structure. But neither Father Riley nor Mr. Sullivan could foresee the major miracle which was about to befall them. The grace and beauty of the exterior were real because they were built into the church. The interior would share this beauty of structure, of line and proportion, but neither priest nor architect dreamed that the interior finish of the church would lift it out of the small number of lovely churches and set it apart among the very few in America which are rare architectural gems. Neither knew then of the genius of John Kirchmayer.

In the spring of 1911 Father Riley had old Saint Francis church moved to a location back of the rectory because it would be needed for services while the new church was building. On July 5, 1911 he observed the traditional rite of turning the first sod, and not he alone but all the boys who were about shared the honor with him. He called them by name one by one, and when he called they dug down and solemnly turned over the ground. Did they sense the significance of the occasion? Did they know that in them Father Riley saw the church of today, the church militant, the keepers of the faith? Some who looked saw a kindly priest sharing his pleasant excitement with boys; others who looked deeper saw in it the touch of poet that was part of Father Riley's nature, a poetry that expressed itself not so much in verse as in action. He loved the beauty he built into the church.

It was this side of his nature that gave him courage to listen to John Kirchmayer, immigrant wood-carver from Oberamergau, when he begged for a chance to finish the interior in hand carved wood like some of the great cathedrals of Europe, to copy the morning chapel after one of the famous chapels of the Middle Ages, to set the great Crucifix over the altar, to carve the reredos, the side altars, the stations and the altar furniture, the cross beams, and last but not least to carve in the solid oak of the front door the twelve apostles, the angels, and the symbols of the Blessed Sacrament. It gave him courage to adopt an artistic finish somewhat somber in an age when people were used to color and bright paint. It led him to get the needed color through glorious stained glass windows.

John Kirchmayer put into the church of the Blessed Sacrament all the wealth of his genius, all the fire of his ambition, his craving for recognition. He worked at an ordinary day's pay. No church he did later was quite like this one;

into no other did he build the rich embroidery of his hopes and dreams. Before this church was completed the great crucifix over the altar had won a prize and had been exhibited. He began as an unknown workman; he finished a recognized artist.

This is not the place, even if there were space, to tell of the symbolism built into the morning chapel, the windows, the decorations of the altar. Our church is like one of the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages, where no decorations existed for decoration's sake, but each one was part of the story of the glory of God and the liturgy of His Church.

On Easter Sunday, April 23, 1913, the cornerstone of the church was laid and the new edifice dedicated. Because it was a completely new church Father Riley had decided to give it a new name, to dedicate it to God alone under the title of the Blessed Sacrament. At the first solemn high Mass Father Riley was the celebrant, Father Thomas I. Gasson, President of Boston College, deacon and preacher, Father Michael Maguire, the assistant, sub-deacon. Mrs. Ella Haney was the organist and there was a choir of thirty mixed voices to sing the Mass.

Although the building of the church was Father Riley's masterpiece, it was not his sole accomplishment. In 1906 he bought a large tract of land in South Walpole which he consecrated as a cemetery under the name of Saint Francis, that the Walpole dead might rest at home, within the confines of their own parish. Previously the people of Walpole had to go to Canton or Foxboro to bury their dead in consecrated ground. With the land Father Riley acquired the old Joyce house, which he intended to use as a home for the superintendent of the cemetery.

The first plot developed in the cemetery was called by Father Riley after his patron, Saint Daniel. He had Mr. Branley, a local forester, surround it with evergreens. Today beautiful arbor vitae trees keep watch over the dead of the early families of old Walpole.

In his time, also, the rectory was enlarged to care for the additional assistants necessary in the growing parish. He left it commodious, attractive and well appointed. Nor did he overlook the needs of the young people in the parish. They had athletic teams, socials, and even a temperance society.

After eighteen years of a fruitful pastorate in Walpole Father Riley was appointed by His Eminence, Cardinal O'Connell, to be pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Jamaica Plain. He preached his final sermon one Sunday in June, 1919, and then went to his new assignment, leaving behind him in church and parish something of his heart, as he had left much of his youth.

VI. The End Of A Cycle

ON THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY Father Timothy Fahey came to Walpole as its third pastor. If he found here a beautiful property he found also a correspondingly heavy debt, one of \$57,000.00. He felt it was his mission to wipe out this debt, and quickly. He set about this task with his customary energy and earnestness. In a surprisingly few years the parish was free of debt.

During these years Walpole and East Walpole continued to grow. Into them poured a tide of immigration as it had poured during the years after the Civil War, but this time the tide set not from Ireland but from Italy. The Italians were attracted to the town by work offered in foundries and machine shops, accepting in their turn hard labor as their lot, as the Puritan founders accepted it, and as the Irish had accepted it in their turn. Walpole had another advantage in the eyes of the land-loving Italians. There was land about, plenty of it, and not too costly to be out of range of a thrifty, hard-working family. At first the Italians had to be satisfied with the poorer, worn-out lands, or raw, unbroken fields, but as time went on and family after family became more prosperous they were able to buy more desirable property. By Father Fahey's pastorate the Italians had become a large and important factor in the town. Other groups were beginning to move in, also. The Poles and Lithuanians were moving in, along the roads from South Norwood.

All this steady flow of new-comers helped to swell the Catholic populations of both Walpole and East Walpole. It was quite evident that the time had come to make provision for separate quarters for the Catholics of East Walpole. At their request Father Fahey interviewed Mr. Charles Sumner Bird, who had on more than one occasion proved himself a staunch friend of the Catholics and a personal friend of Father Riley. He readily granted Father Fahey the use of Bird Hall in East Walpole for the celebration of Mass on Sundays and Holydays. From 1919 to 1926 the Catholics of East Walpole worshipped here.

In 1926 Father Fahey began the construction of a missionary chapel. Although Mr. Bird had offered as a gift to the parish a piece of land for the new chapel, Father Fahey decided upon another piece of property he thought more suitable. The chapel of Saint Mary's was dedicated by Cardinal O'Connell on May 22, 1927. Father Fahey had expected that the new chapel would remain a mission of Walpole, but in September, 1931, East Walpole and South Norwood were set apart as a new parish under the Reverend John Meheran as pastor.

Although the separation of Walpole and East Walpole was inevitable in the nature of things, it was a sad parting. Many of the families of East Walpole had been

parishioners of the mother parish from the time of Father Gouesse and had watched the building first of Saint Francis and then of the Blessed Sacrament Church. But time and growth cannot be held back by sentiment and East Walpole was soon on its way to becoming as large as the original parish.

Father Fahey continued to work and beautify the church and the cemetery. He built the brick steps at the front of the church and thereby added the one thing lacking in its original beauty. The leisurely approach to the church allows the beauty of its facade and the oaken doors to grow upon the beholder.

The cemetery, too, came in for his attention. Father Fahey bought a strip of land along South Street, opposite the cemetery, to protect the property in future years. He placed a beautiful statue of Our Lady of Grace on the first terrace, landscaped the entrance, planting spruces on either side of the drive.

Personally he was brusque and stern, but beneath his rather harsh exterior he was kindly and charitable. The sick and the poor knew his real depths; they knew how sensitive and shy he was in reality. He made no effort to attract or charm his parish, but people respected him and loved him. They were proud of his eloquence and his superb delivery whenever he was invited to participate in a town function.

In April of 1933 Father Fahey was assigned to the Sacred Heart Parish in Roslindale, and on Easter Saturday he left Walpole for his new duties. The departure of Father Fahey ends the historic period of the parish.

He was succeeded by Reverend John O'Riordan, who remained until July, 1940, well liked and truly mourned upon his transfer to Saint Mary's in Winchester, where he is today. Father O'Riordan was succeeded by the present pastor, Reverend Bennet J. O'Brien. Since these last two are hard at work today they belong more to the field of current events than of history. It remains for the historian of the parish centenary twenty-five years hence to look back upon their tenures and to evaluate their contribution to the life and spiritual progress of the parish.

Under Father Fahey the parish of Walpole had completed its first full cycle. It had been a mission of other parishes. It had been a parish with missions of its own. Finally it had become so large that in its turn it had been divided and had become a small parish again. All the hopes it had of a full Catholic life, a parochial school and convent, had to be deferred until such time as it would again grow large enough to support them.

Such things are in the hands of God and in His own good time will find fulfillment, even as Father Gouesse found his grave, not, indeed, as he dreamed, but in a fulfillment far beyond his asking. And so with the hopes of the people of Walpole. Some day, in the providence of God, they will reach rich fulfillment. In the meantime they can but follow the pointing of His finger. He only knows what lies at the end of the road. With deep conviction the parish of Walpole knows it will be good.

Much of the information upon which this history has been built has been contributed by:

MR. WILLIAM MAHONEY
MRS. MARGARET CREEDON
MRS. ELIZABETH CALDWELL
MISS ANNA CALDWELL
MRS. WILLIAM GOODFELLOW
MISS ELLEN MAHONEY
MR. P. J. MAHONEY
MISS GERTRUDE KIVLIN
MR. JEROME KIVLIN
MR. JOSEPH GREENWOOD

MRS. CHARLES HANEY
MRS. HANNAH HALE
MR. WILLIAM HALE
MR. FRANK WALSH
MISS EDITH WALSH
MISS MARGARET MOORE
MISS MARGARET KANNALLY
MRS. SALVATORE CAMELIO
MR. JAMES REARDON

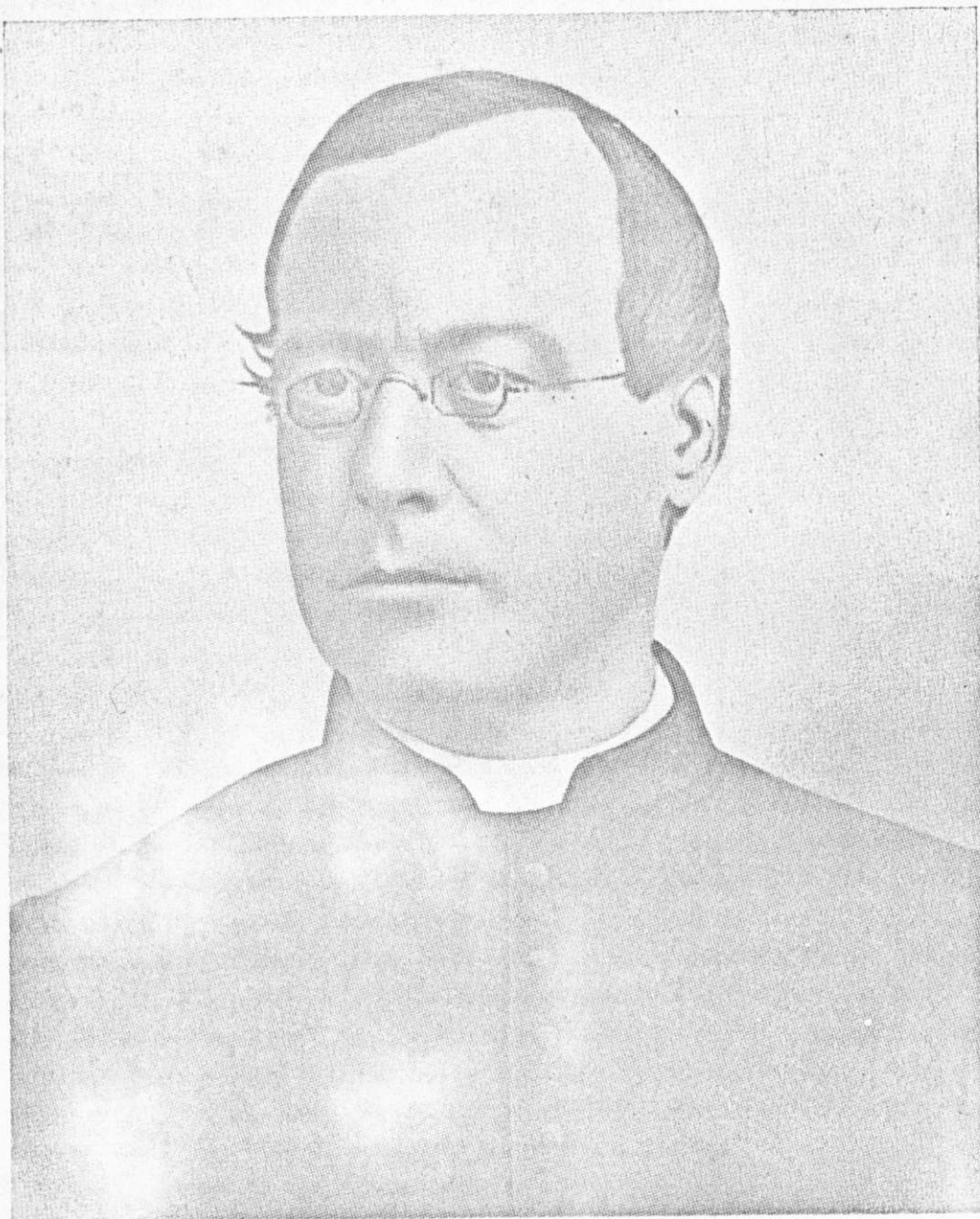
HISTORIANS

REVEREND BENNET J. O'BRIEN

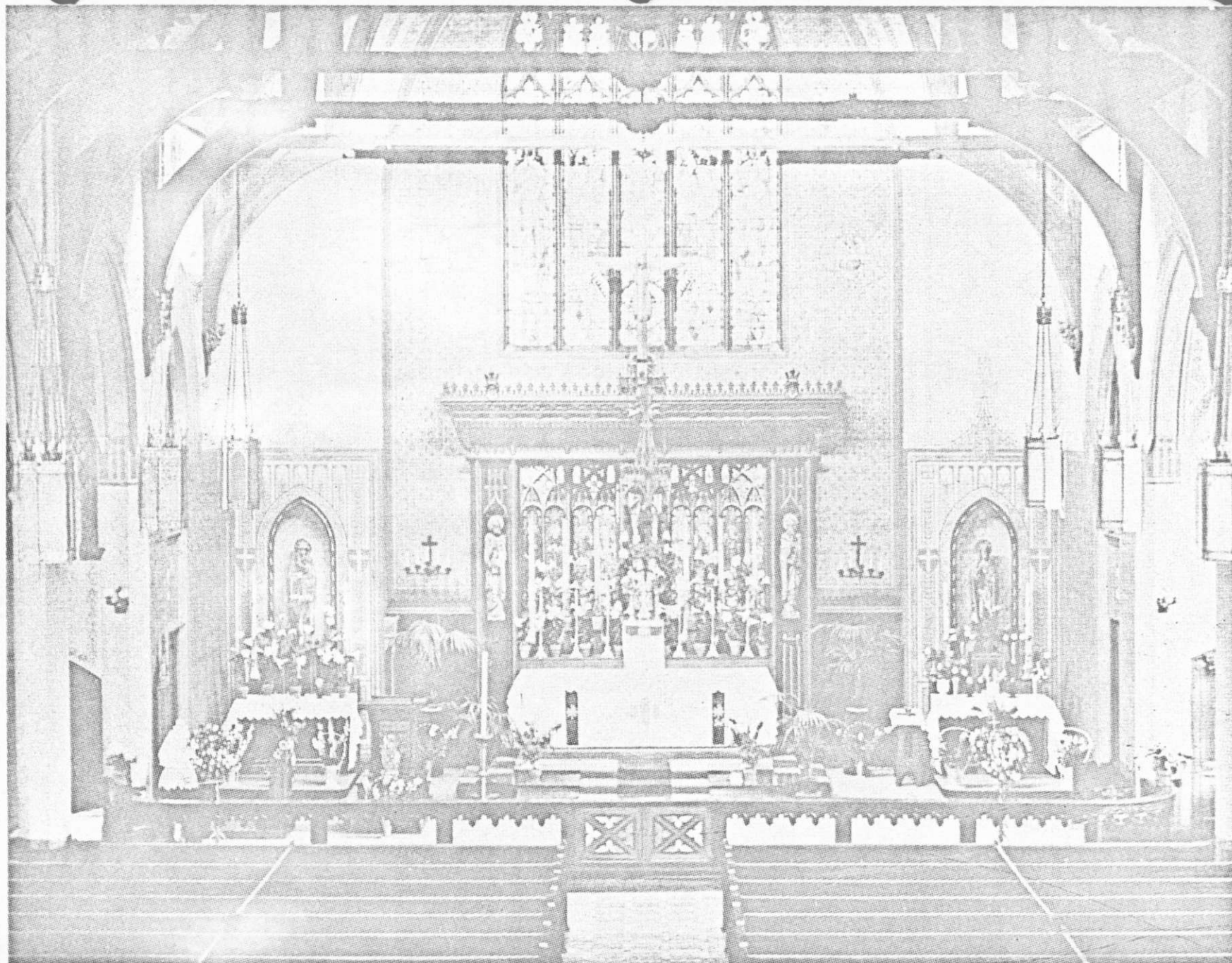
MERCEDES E. O'BRIEN, PH. D

St Francis Cemetery - 4th block
(former ~~Bogdan~~ Bogdan) - 2nd on
East - 706

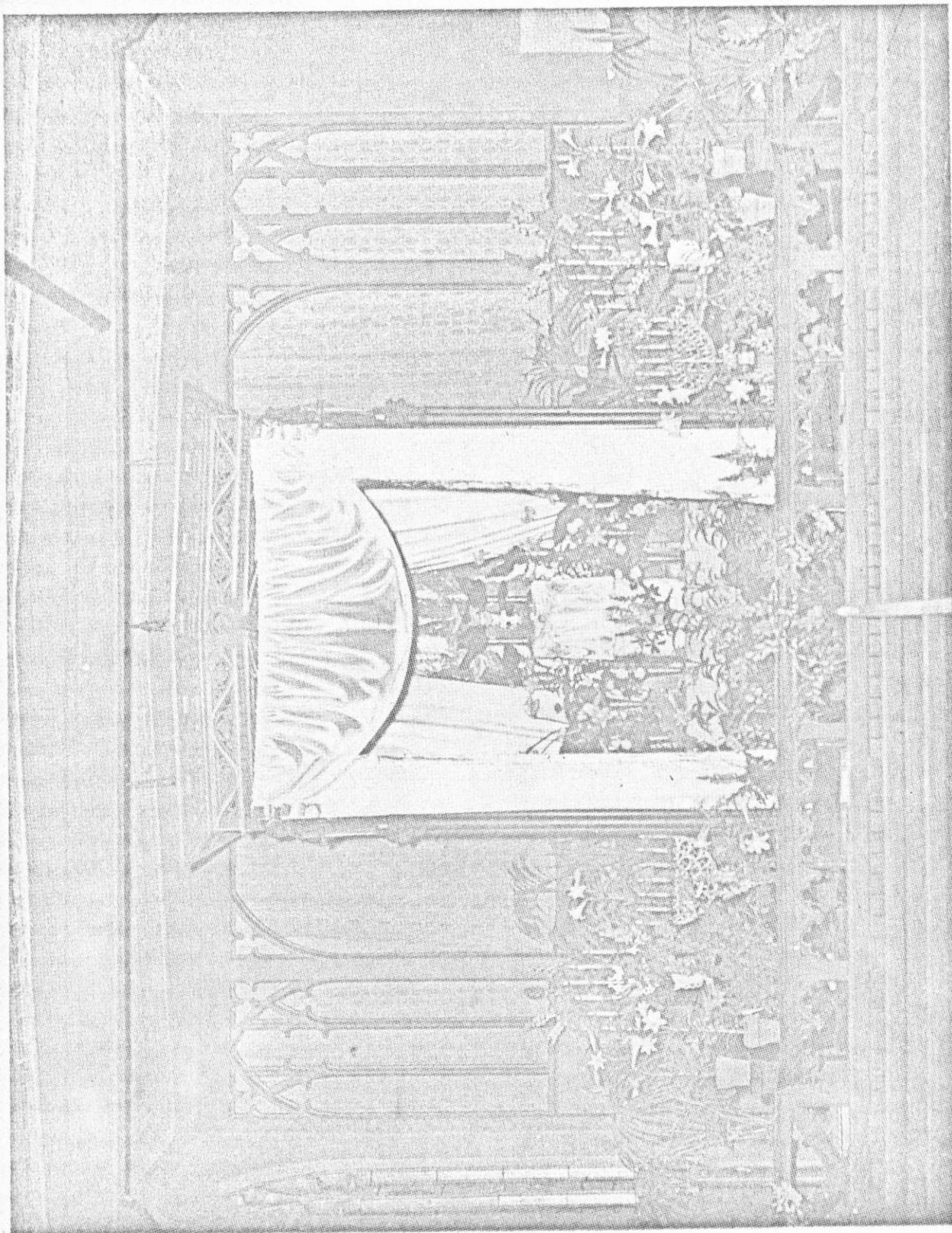
Raid - 1st person buried there
died in the night - picked up a gun
- carried with person not he died.



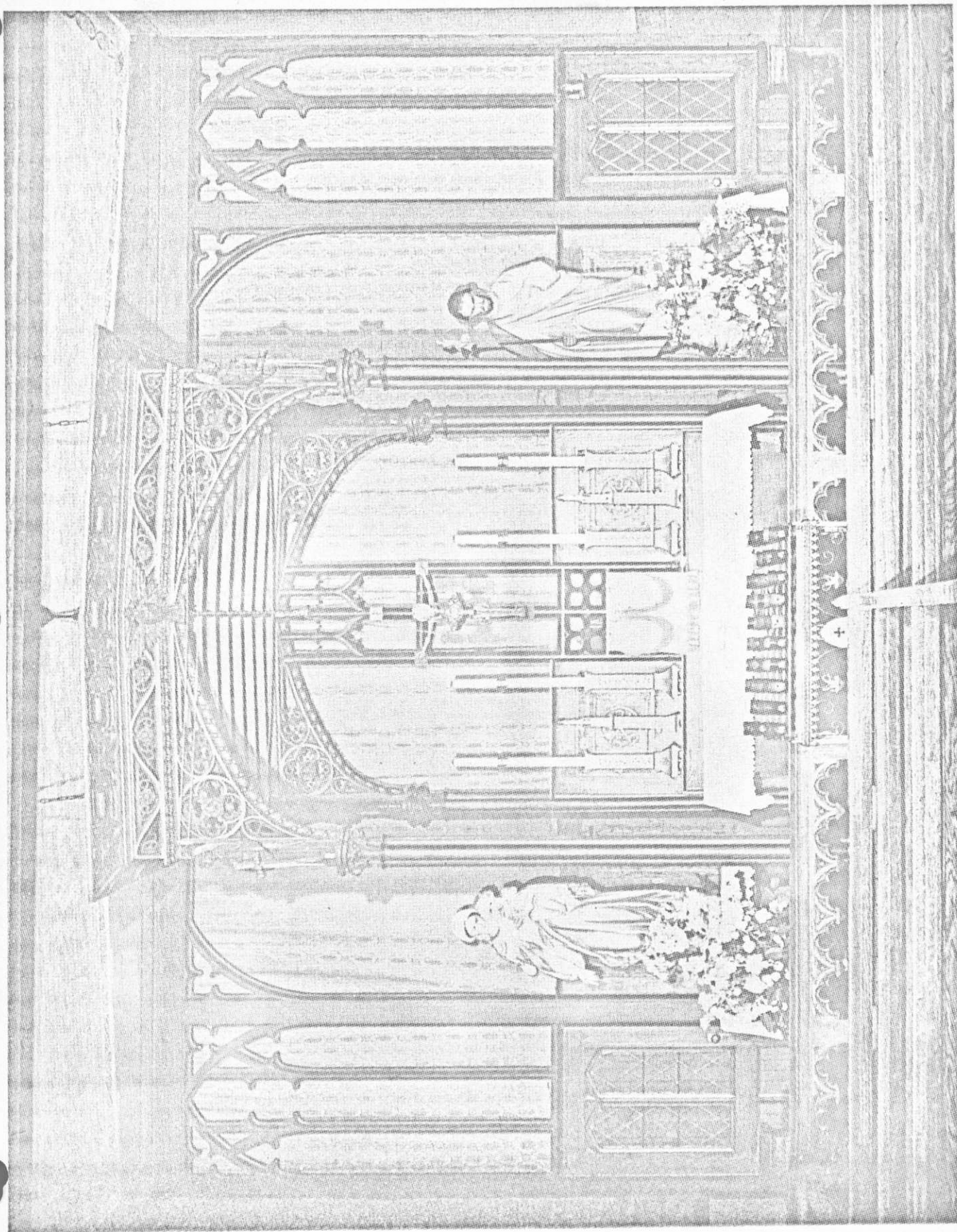
REVEREND FRANCIS GOUESSE
Parish Priest, 1872-1901



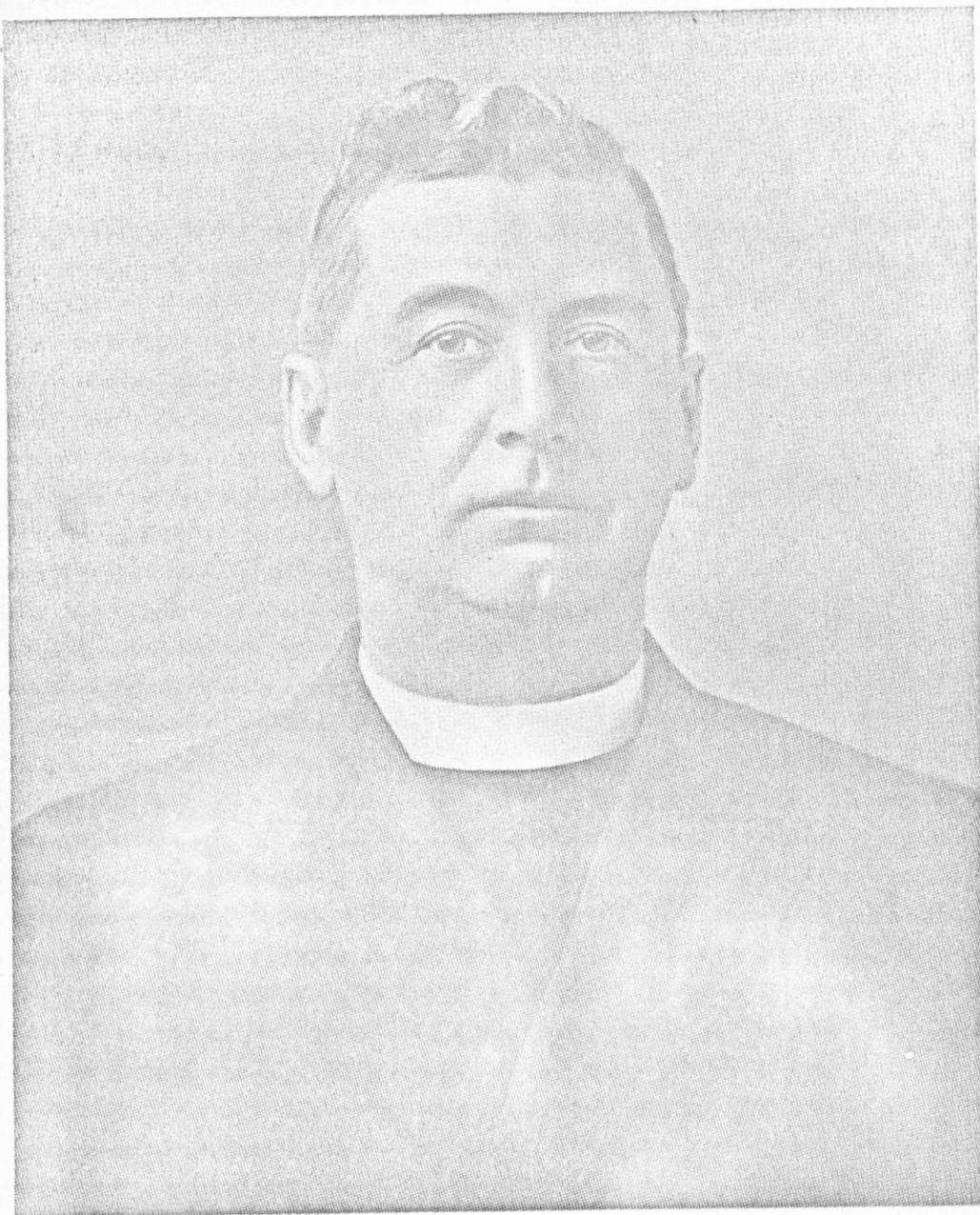
BLESSED SACRAMENT CHURCH — INTERIOR



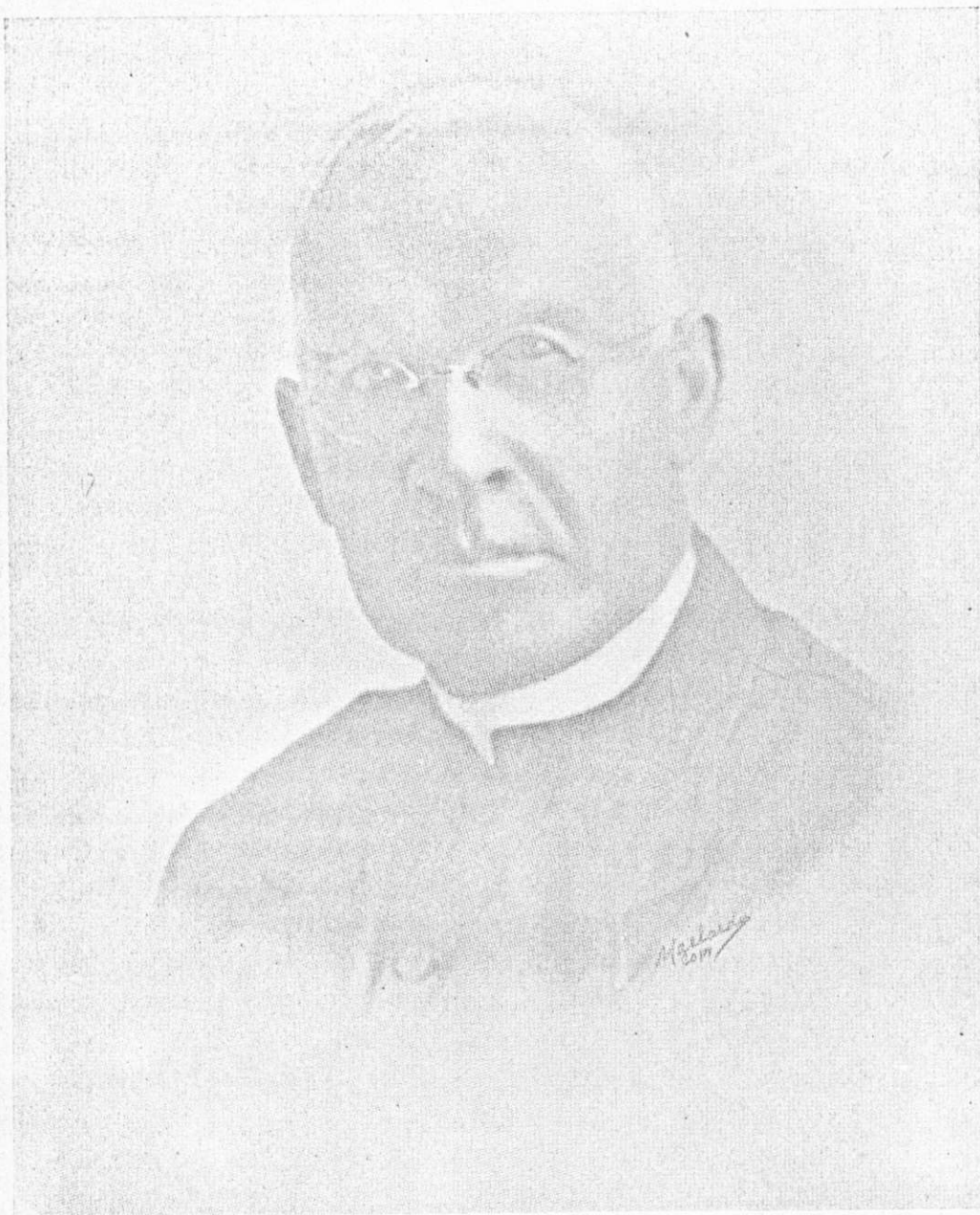
THE REPOSITORY



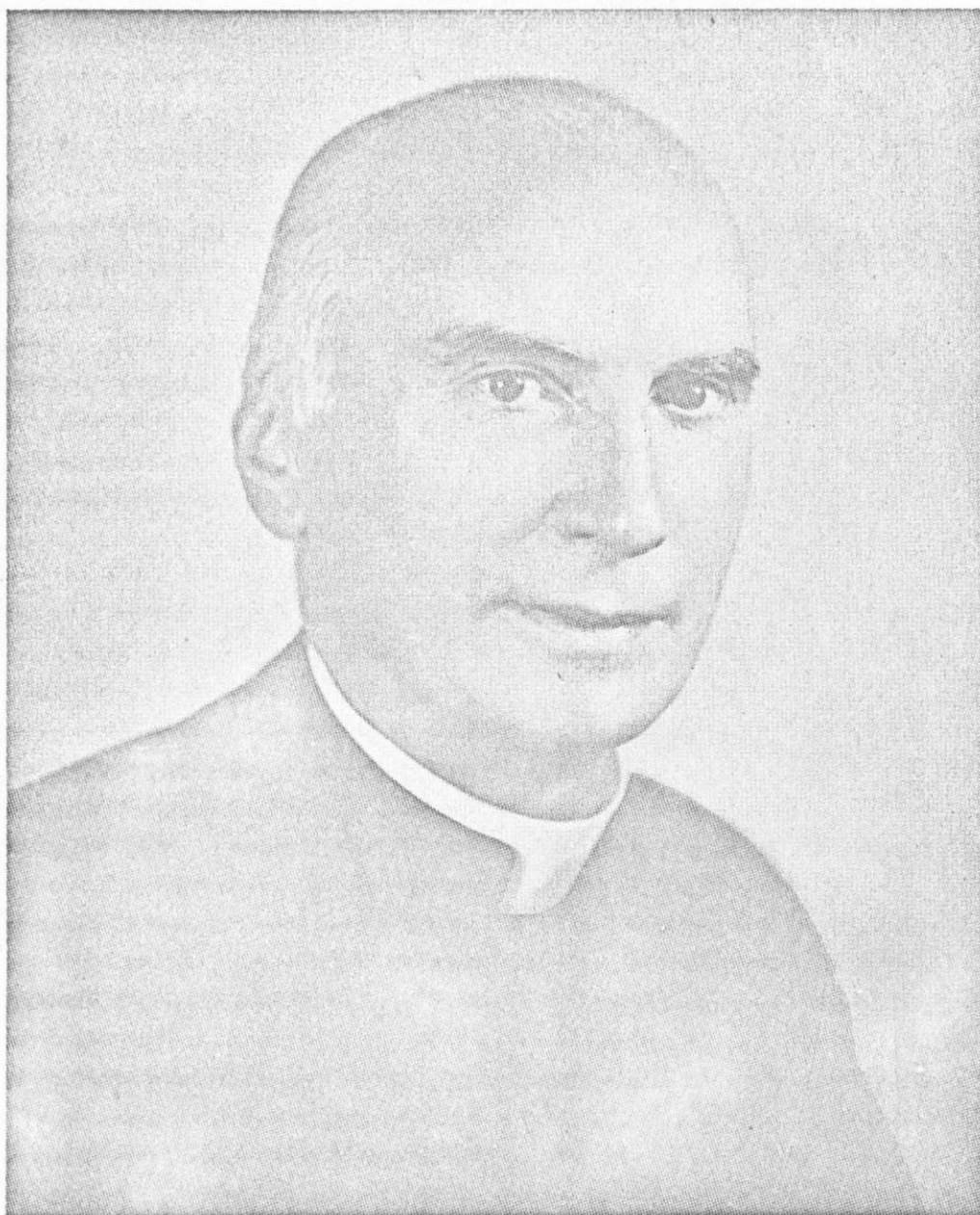
THE MORNING CHAPEL



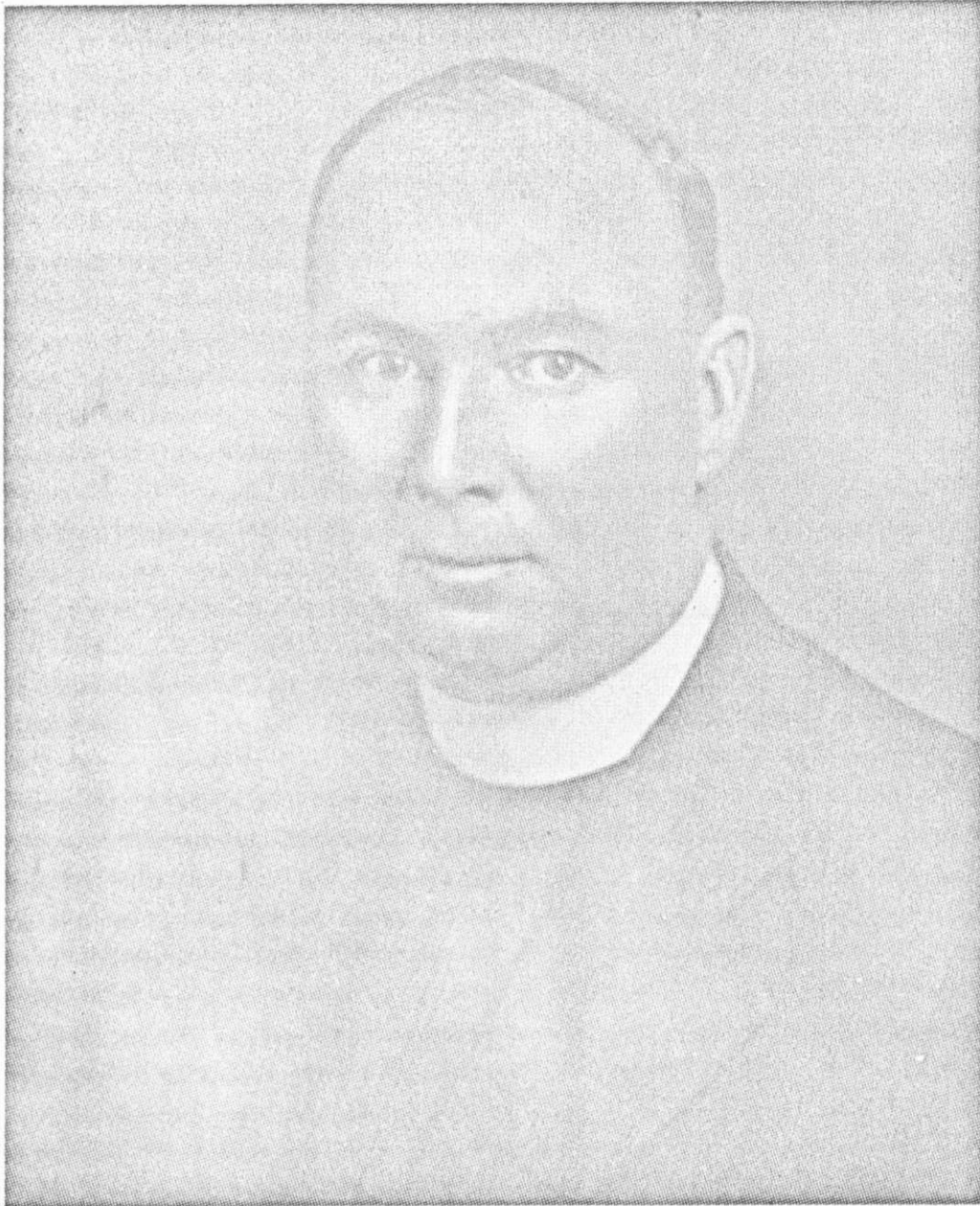
REVEREND DANIEL H. RILEY
Parish Priest, 1901-1919



REVEREND TIMOTHY J. FAHEY
Parish Priest, 1919-1933



REVEREND JOHN P. O'RIORDAN
Parish Priest, 1933-1940



REVEREND BENNET J. O'BRIEN
Parish Priest, 1940



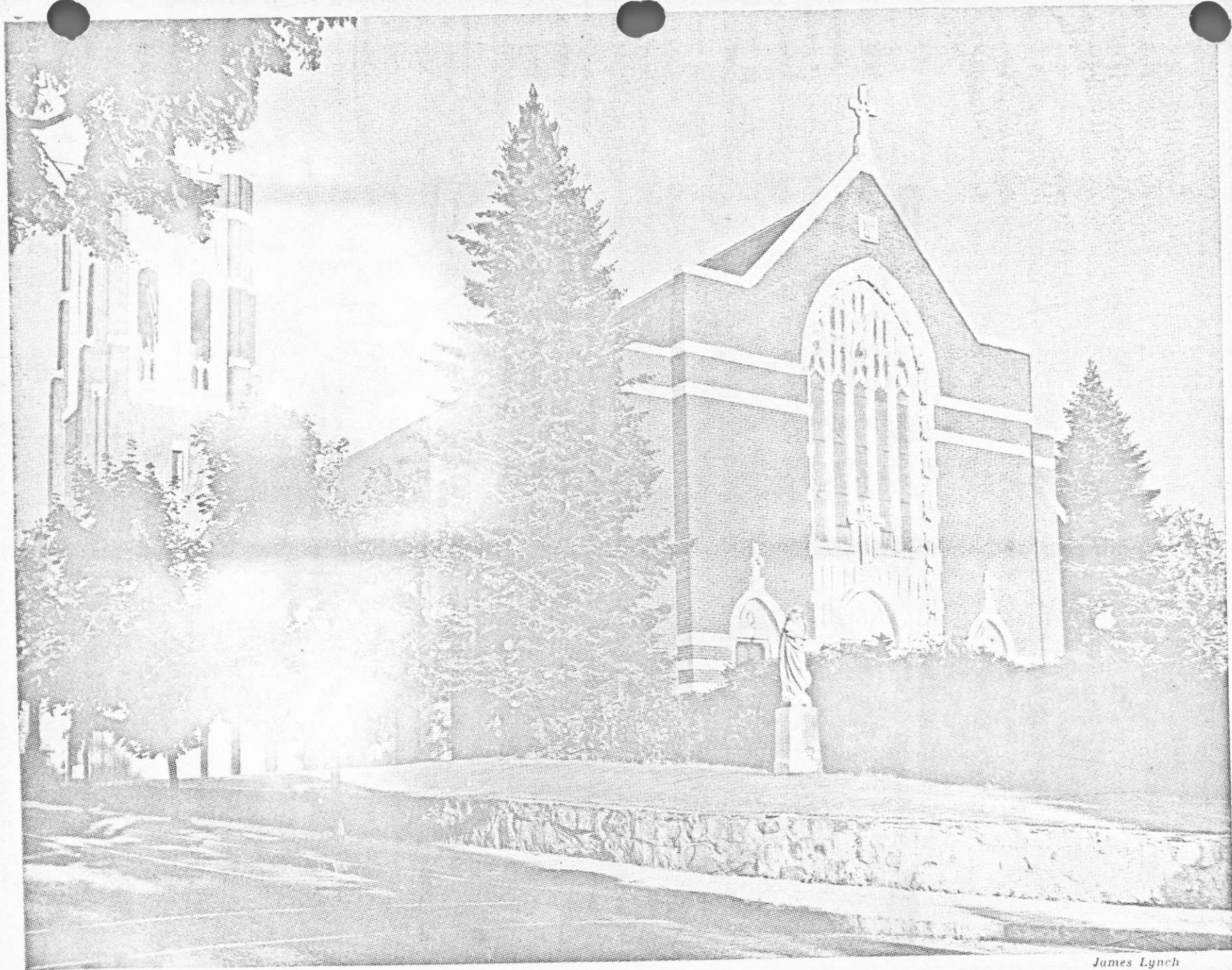
REVEREND FRANCIS J. McGANN
Assistant, 1949



To the
Priests and People
of the Blessed Sacrament Parish
With love and blessings and congratulations
to all on the occasion
of the
Seventieth Fifth Jubilee
of the Parish
+ Richard J. Hunt



MOST REVEREND JOHN J. WRIGHT, D.D.
Auxiliary Bishop of Boston



BLESSED SACRAMENT CHURCH
Walpole, Massachusetts

James Lynch



ST. MARY'S CHURCH, R.C.

1931

East Walpole

July 81 St. Mary's Church nears its Golden Jubilee

This fall will mark the 59th anniversary of St. Mary's Church which was established September 8, 1931. The church, which serves over 3,000 parishioners, began as a "mission" of the Blessed Sacrament Church on Diamond Street, says Father William Burns, pastor of St. Mary's.

According to Burns, in 1919 the Catholic diocese in Boston decided a "mission" was necessary in East Walpole because of the increasing number of Catholics in the area. But because the actual need was still unknown, the diocese was reluctant to establish a church. Thus the mission was founded and mass was held in Bird Hall until 1927. Then convinced a church would grow and survive in East Walpole, the diocese decided St. Mary's would be constructed on Washington Street.

St. Mary's, though, remained a "mission" until 1931 when William Cardinal O'Connell officially recognized the parish as a church. Since then the parish has continued to

thrive, and expand its facilities, as well as attract nearly one fourth of its parishioners from Norwood, Burns says.

Burns attributes part of the church's success to the establishment of a parish center in 1960. The building, which is located across the street from the church, was purchased for \$50,000 from Antonio Lorusso. The funds for that purchase were part of a bequest from the estate of George McCabe.

"Mr. McCabe was a bachelor from Walpole who was actively involved in church," says Burns, "and he decided to leave his money to St. Mary's."

Burns emphasizes that the continued generosity of parishioners has enabled the church to grow within the community.

In fact, he says, when Lorusso initially sold the church the property for the parish center, he promised that one day those monies would be returned. Burns says that through the years Lorusso surpassed his promise by

liberally donating items and loaning money interest free to the church.

Another driving force behind the parish center was Father Francis Mara, who was then a curate of the parish.

"He was only here 15 months, but the center was a great accomplishment," says Burns. "He could be found in overalls and hammer out there helping to build it."

Mara, however, died of a heart attack in the late 1970's and parishioners dedicated the auditorium in the parish center to his memory.

Plans to celebrate the anniversary are already underway with the highlight being a 4 p.m. mass September 26 concelebrated by Cardinal Humberto Medeiros. The cardinal will meet with parishioners after the mass, Burns says.

A banquet is planned on November 4 and a historical anniversary booklet is currently being prepared for publication, Burns says.